3 Mobilising evangelicals for development advocacy

Politics and theology in the Micah Challenge campaign for the Millennium Development Goals

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Introduction

Evangelical Christians are known for their inner worldly religion and their focus on personal morality and spiritual experience. Yet since the second half of the 20th century a gradual process of opening up to consider also this-worldly matters has begun to take place in certain quarters of the Evangelical world. One of the drivers behind this 'new evangelical social engagement' (Steensland and Goff 2014) has been the involvement of Evangelical relief and development NGOs in humanitarian work in the global South. The number of Evangelical development NGOs has increased exponentially during this time and the amount of money donated by Evangelicals and their churches has also soared (Reynolds and Offut 2014, p. 248). Evangelicals have developed their own theology of development, known as 'integral mission' or 'transformational development,' and which now guides the development work of most Evangelical NGOs (Freeman 2018). This theology has sought to open up traditional notions of sin and redemption and to shift them from being seen as personal matters and to argue that they are deeply social. And a focus on the coming of the just and harmonious Kingdom of God has shifted the locus of redemption from the individual to 'all of creation' and from the far future to the 'already/not yet'.

The latest stage in this process of Evangelical opening to worldly matters has been the recent move towards Evangelicals getting engaged in advocacy on development issues. At present this is quite a tentative step, still met with much reticence and resistance. For most Evangelicals to start to engage with politics on behalf of the global poor is still a step too far. Nonetheless, in 2004 the first Evangelical transnational advocacy campaign for justice for the poor was set up. This campaign, called the Micah Challenge, sought to mobilise the global Evangelical church to advocate to their national governments to do what they could to end global poverty, and in particular to support the Millennium Development Goals. This chapter looks at the genesis of the Micah Challenge and explores the way in which it sought to develop a theology of justice and advocacy in order to try to mobilise Evangelicals to campaign on behalf of the poor. It shows how the tension between the personal and the social, the inner-worldly and the outer-worldly,

shaped the way that Micah Challenge communicated about development advocacy and ultimately led to a paradox which it could not overcome. To make justice and advocacy palatable to global Evangelicals it had to develop a theology which placed a great emphasis on personal morality and spirituality, and yet in doing so it lost focus on the global political and economic issues that it wished to raise.

This study also seeks to make a theoretical contribution to the literature on religion and development. While much of this literature has focused on the role of religion in development cooperation, particularly looking at how faith-based organisations (FBOs) may, or may not, be effective at implementing development projects (e.g. Clarke 2008; Ter Haar and Ellis 2006; Tomalin 2015), there have been calls to widen out the research focus to consider also other aspects of the religion and development nexus (e.g. Jones and Petersen 2011). This chapter seeks to consider the role of FBOs in mobilising the public, or a specific religious constituency, to campaign for development outcomes. It thus speaks to other recent work that has sought to look at forms of religious action in the UN (Haynes in this volume; Haynes 2014) and forms of religious action in the global economy more generally (Dreher and Smith 2016). And by exploring the way that the Micah Challenge sought to change the development discourse of a particular religious constituency, the study presents an interesting case of development entrepreneurship (Koehrsen and Heuser 2019 this volume).

The chapter starts by giving a brief overview of the history of Evangelical social action and then goes on to explore the new Evangelical theology of development which came to the fore in the latter half of the 20th century and upon which all subsequent developments build. It then looks at Evangelical involvement in the Jubilee 2000 anti-debt campaign and shows how this laid the groundwork for the Micah Challenge to emerge a few years later. After exploring the genesis and rationale for the Micah Challenge, the chapter goes on to consider in detail the theology of justice and advocacy which it developed in order to mobilise Evangelicals for development advocacy. It concludes by arguing that even though the Micah Challenge sought to connect the personal and the structural in their theology, they ultimately did not manage to overcome the theological blocks which this constituency has regarding engaging in development advocacy.[1]

A brief history of Evangelical social engagement

It is important to start by looking at the history of Evangelical social engagement as this will show the changing context in the Evangelical world out of which the Micah Challenge emerged. Evangelicalism started in the 1730s as a Christian revival movement in the UK and Europe and quickly spread to America, where it grew rapidly to become one of the country's largest religious movements. It was later spread round the world by Evangelical missionaries, and there are now Evangelical churches in most countries. Evangelicalism offers an intensely personal Christianity by fostering a deep sense of spiritual conviction and personal redemption, and by encouraging introspection and a commitment to a new standard of personal morality (Bebbington 1993; Ditchfield 1998; Hutchinson and Wolffe 2012).

During the 18th and 19th centuries Evangelicals engaged with society as part and parcel of the practice of faith. Prominent British Evangelicals, such as John Wesley and William Wilberforce, worked tirelessly for social reform and the end of slavery, and 19th-century Evangelical politician Lord Shaftesbury passed acts in parliament to alleviate some of the injustices caused by the Industrial Revolution, such as prohibiting the employment of women and children in coal mines and establishing a ten-hour day for factory workers (Heasman 1962; Finlayson 1981).William Carey preached and planted churches in India, whilst also speaking out against the caste system (Tizon 2011, p. 62). In Australia Evangelicals were amongst those leading the call for the rights and humane treatment of the indigenous population (Sloane 2011, p. 3). American Evangelicals established charities and philanthropic organisations to help the poor and were amongst the most active social reformers during this time, campaigning to improve the conditions of prisoners, running orphanages and founding homes for juvenile delinquents (Steensland and Goff 2014, p. 5; Young 2006). Charles Finney, a leading American Evangelical revivalist, could write in the mid-19th century:

> The great business of the church is to reform the world. The Church of Christ was originally organised to be a body of reformers. The very profession of Christianity implies the profession and virtually an oath to do all that can be done for the universal reformation of the world.
>
> (cited in Tinker 1999, p. 2)

However, in the early decades of the 20th century two processes led to Evangelicals retreating from their engagement with the world and developing an increasingly privatised, inner-worldly religion. The first was a reaction to the so-called 'social gospel', a theology that was growing in popularity in the liberal wings of the Protestant church, and that argued that the role of Christians was not to save souls so that they would get a place in heaven, but rather to reconstruct society on a Christian basis so that life on earth would become as harmonious as that in heaven. The second was a shift within Evangelical circles to a dispensationalist premillennial theology which considered that there was no way that people could improve their worldly lot, and that things would only get worse and worse until Jesus returned and brought about heaven on earth. Within such a theology social reform was seen as futile and hopeless, while saving souls became a matter of utmost urgency. The combined effect of these two factors, within the broader context of the post-Enlightenment privatisation of religion, led to Evangelicals retreating almost entirely from any kind of social engagement in the first half of 20th century (Moberg 1972). This approach to spirituality and the material world was then spread around the globe by Evangelical missionaries, with the result that most of the newly forming indigenous Evangelical churches in the global South largely also adopted this focus on the inner spiritual life, with little interest in social engagement (Tizon 2011, p. 62). The social gospel movement became firmly entrenched in the mainstream Protestant ecumenical movement as embodied by the World Council of Churches, and Evangelicals distanced themselves

from this movement and instead built their own global ecumenical movement in the form of the World Evangelical Alliance.

Whilst the first half of the 20th century was characterised by an almost total lack of social engagement by Evangelicals, the second half of the century was increasingly taken up by discussions questioning this position. This was started in 1947 by the publication of *The Uneasy Conscience of Fundamentalism* by Carl Henry, a leading American Evangelical theologian, which reflected on earlier Evangelical social action and called for a return to this kind of activity. Since then increasing numbers of Evangelicals have started to engage in social issues. Many are focussing on the poor in their own communities and in nearby neighbour-hoods. This is now increasingly common, for example, in the Vineyard Movement (Bialecki 2008, 2009) and in the Emerging Church movement (Bielo 2011, 2014) and even amongst conservative Evangelicals (Elisha 2008, 2011). There have also been calls from progressive evangelicals to engage with poverty more widely and to consider the poor across the globe (Gasaway 2014; Pally 2011; Sider 1977; Swartz 2012a, 2012b). In the global South, Evangelicals are also increasingly getting involved in politics (Freston 2001; Ranger 2008). These communities all represent very different wings of Evangelicalism, and they approach these issues in quite different ways. Nonetheless, this 'new evangelical social engagement' represents a major sea change in many quarters of global Evangelicalism and has only recently begun to receive serious scholarly analysis (Steensland and Goff 2014). In this chapter I will focus on just one movement within this broader sea change, and that is the group of Evangelicals engaging in relief and development work overseas and promoting an approach called integral mission or transforma-tional development.

This particular movement was largely started by Evangelicals living in the South, particularly in Latin America. Living close to poverty and inequality, and influenced by the social action of Catholic Liberation Theology, theologians from the Latin American Evangelical Fellowship, notably Rene Padilla and Samuel Escobar, sought to develop a new theology which would integrate both evange-lism and socio-political involvement on behalf of the poor into a holistic unity. They wanted to respond to the same realities addressed by liberationists while still upholding their evangelical commitments to the authority of scripture, the divinity of Christ and the necessity of evangelism. Their solution, which they called 'misíon integral', or integral mission, emphasized an incarnational and kingdom-centred theology which claimed that because Jesus was Lord over all of creation and all spheres of life, there was no real distinction between serv-ing spiritual needs and serving physical needs. From this perspective the mission of the church could not simply be reduced to winning converts but must also include action on behalf of the poor and for social justice (Carpenter 2014, p. 274; Clawson 2012, p. 792). In the 1960s they began to increasingly participate in international Evangelical conferences, and they started to push for their vision of a more holistic understanding of the gospel that included social engagement. This was not an easy discussion and many conservative Evangelicals pushed back and argued that their one and only focus should be evangelism. In the meantime

Evangelical missionaries working oversees and carrying out humanitarian work became troubled at the lack of theology to justify their actions (Padilla 2002, p. 2; Tizon 2011, p. 66).

These tensions came to a head at the Lausanne Conference in 1974, attended by some 2,500 Evangelicals from 150 countries. Rene Padilla and Samuel Escobar both gave provocative plenary addresses presenting their theology of 'misíon integral', and calling on Evangelicals to get involved in social action. These addresses generated a lot of discussion and in the resulting Lausanne Covenant there was an entire section on Christian social responsibility, which stated that 'we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty . . . the salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities' (cited in Clawson 2012, p. 796).

Whilst Lausanne was a key turning point regarding Evangelical engagement with social issues, it was not the end of the story. In the following years fierce battles raged in the Evangelical world about whether Evangelicals should engage in social action or remain focused solely on evangelism, and whether mission should include humanitarian action or should focus only on converting the unreached peoples. The fundamentalists were not easily swayed, particularly those from North America, and they continued to argue for the focus on saving souls.

During this same time, and in parallel, several Evangelical relief and development NGOs were formed. In America the National Association of Evangelicals established World Relief in 1944, World Vision was founded in 1950, Compassion in 1952, Samaritan's Purse in 1970 and Food for the Hungry in 1971 (Reynolds and Offut 2014, p. 244). In the UK the Evangelical Alliance established Tearfund in 1968, and in the following years similar Tear or Tearfund organisations were set up in Australia (1971), New Zealand (1973), the Netherlands (1973), Belgium (1979) and Switzerland (1984). Some smaller Evangelical development organisations were also set up in other European countries. These NGOs got involved in humanitarian relief work, and later in development work, even though there was no specific Evangelical theology of social engagement or of international development. For the most part they carried out development projects in much the same way as secular development NGOs worked at the time (Freeman 2018).

Development as transformation: the theology of integral mission

Starting in 1980, however, Evangelicals began to work on developing a new theology of international development to guide their actions. The first important steps were taken during the World Evangelical Fellowship consultation which culminated in the Wheaton Statement of 1983, and which set out the outlines of a specifically Christian approach to development. Crucially, the participants chose to move away from the term 'development', with its connotations of modernity, materiality and sole focus on economic growth, and instead adopted the term 'transformation'.[2]

The Wheaton statement describes transformation in the following way:

> Transformation is the change from a condition of human existence contrary
> to God's purpose to one in which people are able to enjoy fullness of life in
> harmony with God. This transformation can only take place through the obe-
> dience of individuals and communities to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, whose
> power changes the lives of men and women by releasing them from the guilt,
> power, and consequences of sin, enabling them to respond with love toward
> God and toward others. . . . The goal of transformation is best described by
> the biblical vision of the Kingdom of God.
>
> (World Evangelical Fellowship 1983)

The statement goes on to talk about different aspects of transformation, and claims
that to move towards living under God's reign requires not just the spiritual trans-
formation of individuals, but also the transformation of economies, cultures and
socio-political systems. It presents a vision of holistic change leading in the direc-
tion of the Kingdom of God.

The worldview underlying integral mission theology is based on the doctrines
of creation, fall and redemption. In this view God created the world and created
people to live together in harmony, to be stewards of the earth and to share its
resources equitably. However the fall was brought about by the work of the devil
and people's innate tendency to self-interest. It led to human existence becom-
ing corrupted and bent away from God's intentions. From an integral mission
viewpoint this includes social sin and corruption as well as individual sin and
corruption. Economic systems, political systems, cultures, society, all became
infused with evil and twisted from what God had intended. This, then, is viewed
as the fundamental cause of poverty and injustice. God's intention, however, is
redemption. In the theology of integral mission redemption is not solely a per-
sonal, private affair, but it also social and worldly. Redemption is for all of crea-
tion. A central facet of redemption, in this understanding, is bringing about the
Kingdom of God, in which there will be harmony, peace and justice.

Followers of integral mission draw on the Kingdom theology developed in the
1950s by George Eldon Ladd, Professor of Biblical Theology at Fuller Theologi-
cal Seminary. In his view, the Kingdom is not a special realm, but it is the reign
of God. This reign has already been inaugurated, by Jesus Christ, but will only
be completed on his return. Thus the Kingdom is 'already/not yet' (Ladd 1959).
Whilst acknowledging that full redemption, and hence the ultimate resolution of
earthly problems such as poverty and injustice, will only come about when Jesus
returns, integral mission theology argues that it is still important to work towards
them and thus draw in the Kingdom into the present.[3]

The focus on Kingdom opens out redemption from the individual to the social
and calls Evangelicals to look at the world around them and to be involved in its
betterment. It is a radically different view to the mainstream premillennial dispen-
sationalist theology that is predominant in many conservative Evangelical circles.

And it has radically different implications regarding the value of social action in the world. From the viewpoint of premillennial dispensationalism it is understood that the fallen world will only get more and more depraved until Jesus comes back to bring a spiritual redemption for the saved. For these Evangelicals, still the majority, redemption is thus a personal matter and the focus of action in the world should be only to save souls so that they too get to participate in the ultimate redemption. Trying to improve life in the world, from the dispensationalist perspective, is both pointless and futile. Integral mission thus offers a radically different perspective.

In the late 1990s the leading Evangelical development NGOs tried to work out how to put this theology into practice in their overseas development work. World Vision led a series of meetings with practitioners to share ideas and experiences and chose to adopt the language of 'transformational development'. A few years later Bryant Myers, a member of Fuller Theological Seminary and a World Vision development practitioner, published *Walking with the Poor* (1999), a book about transformational development for the development worker from the perspective of World Vision. Around the same time Tearfund established a team of theologians and development professionals to develop a clear theological understanding of what would constitute a truly Christian development work (Freeman 2019). In 1996 this group launched Tearfund's 'Operating Principles' (Tearfund 1996), which set out its understanding of a distinctively Christian understanding of poverty and development, and in 1998, following the appointment of Rene Padilla as Tearfund's International President, they decided to adopt the language of integral mission.

In 2001 Tearfund was instrumental in establishing an international network of Evangelical relief and development NGOs with the express aim of promoting the vision and practice of integral mission. This network was named the Micah Network, taking its inspiration from the biblical passage Micah 6:8, which says, 'And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God'. It now has well over 500 members organisations and national networks in over 80 countries, all working to spread the idea of integral mission and to make it more mainstream. This has led to the concept of integral mission becoming widely accepted amongst Evangelical development NGOs and for the most part it now guides their approach to engaging in development work.

The shift to integral mission or transformational development had two major impacts on the development work of Evangelical NGOs. Firstly, it brought around a re-framing of this work from being a purely material matter to being a form of religious practice (see Freeman 2018, 2019). And secondly, in many cases it shifted their focus from large-scale projects to small-scale community development, in most cases in partnership with the local church. The new approach stressed that moving towards God's Kingdom required bringing about transformation at all levels – individual and social, spiritual and material. Thus transforming communities and 'restoring relationships' was seen to be central. Since local churches were seen as the basic unit of Christian society, and they were located

within communities, it followed to integral mission thinkers that the local church that should be the agent of holistic community transformation:

> [Integral mission] is fundamentally about restoring relationships – with one-self, with others, with God and with creation. Indeed, broken relationships are at the root of poverty, for poverty is the result of a social and structural leg-acy of broken relationships with God, damaged understanding of self, unjust relationships between people and exploitative relationships with the environ-ment. The local church is at the heart of transforming these relationships.
>
> (Raistrick 2010, p. 138)

And in this worldview evangelism and social action, or in more traditional Evan-gelical language, proclamation and demonstration, should not simply be com-bined, but it should be realized that they are actually part and parcel of the same thing. The Micah Declaration on Integral Mission states it thus:

> Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demon-stration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclama-tion has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.
>
> (Micah Network 2001)

As the theology of integral mission has become more widely accepted in some sections of the Evangelical church, particularly in the UK and Australia, during the second half of the 20th century it has also become commonplace to see Evangelical churches engaging with their surrounding poorer communities and giving money to Evangelical development NGOs. Most UK evangelicals would now agree that engagement with issues of poverty is important. A recent survey by the UK's Evangelical Alliance found that the majority of UK Evangelicals now believe that evangelism and social action are equally important and that 85% say that their Church is currently engaged in social action with the local community (Alliance 2011; Green and Hewitt 2011, pp. 5–12). The Director of the Churches Team at Tearfund[4] described the situation to me like this:

> The UK church has been on a journey . . . about 15 years ago we were still having a lively debate about whether our faith was proclamation or works. We were still having that argument in the Evangelical church . . . people were still arguing amongst themselves about what the whole gospel was, about what the holistic gospel was. But I think that we have moved away from that debate now. There are really only a few people who would say 'no, no, no, it's only about proclamation' . . . I think the church has come to a settled place where they are saying it's both/and. . . . Now people are in that place where they believe that proclamation and works should go hand in hand.

And the Head of Micah Australia described a very similar situation there:

> At the start a theology of justice was not well developed amongst Evangelicals at all. You had mainstream and liberal Protestant Christians and Catholics really grappling to understand and engaging with links between justice and faith. . . . But you had the majority of the Evangelical church defining itself in absolute opposition to that, because anything other than personal evangelism is some sort of second order priority. . . . But that has really shifted. I think part of the shift has been some really intentional investments by particular leaders in moving their congregations. For example Baptist World Aid has played a really pivotal role inside the Baptist movement . . . to help really deepen that sense of justice at the heart of people's faith expressions. Early on Tear were distinctive by saying 'we're the Evangelicals that care about justice' and they were a small and beleaguered sect within their church communities. But increasingly it's a mainstream concept.

Even in America there is an increasing trend for Evangelicals to get involved in social action with local poor communities and to give money to Evangelical relief and development NGOs working to alleviate poverty overseas (Reynolds and Offut 2014; Steensland and Goff 2014).

Integral mission, advocacy and Jubilee 2000

Once the theology of integral mission had become quite widely accepted in the Evangelical church in the UK and Australia, and to varying degrees in Evangelical churches in other countries, some Evangelical development NGOs started in the late 1990s to push for a deeper understanding of justice and for an extension of integral mission to focus not just on transforming communities, but to also look at transforming unfair global structures. They began to suggest that Evangelical development NGOs should also engage in political advocacy about the global and national structural issues that often underlie local instantiations of poverty. World Vision adopted a policy statement on advocacy in 1991 and now has an advocacy budget of around $7 million. Other American Evangelical development NGOs, including Food for the Hungry, International Justice Commission and the Mennonite Central Committee now have offices in Washington and have also started to engage in political advocacy (Reynolds and Offut 2014, p. 247). In the UK Tearfund started advocacy and campaigning work in 1997 and currently has an annual advocacy budget of around £4.4 million, representing some 8% of their total budget (Tearfund 2015). Since then other members of the Tear family have developed advocacy programmes to greater or lesser extents. This move towards advocacy was partly a result of developments in Evangelical social thought and partly something that was influenced by the general shift of large secular international development NGOs towards an increased focus on advocacy around the structural issues affecting poverty and the beginning of their involvement in transnational advocacy coalitions to address global

issues (Bryer and Magrath 1999; Fowler 1999; Hudson 2002; Rugendyke 2007; Yanacopulos 2015).

For the most part the advocacy carried out by Evangelical development NGOs since the late 1990s has been professional lobbying of politicians carried out by trained experts.[5] However this changed in the UK and Australia when Evangelicals became swept up in the massive Jubilee 2000 campaign to cancel poor countries' debt that ran from 1996 to 2000. This campaign was initiated in the UK, with the support of both Christian and secular development NGOs and soon spread to over 60 countries. Its centre point was a petition calling for the cancelling of debts of the world's poorest countries, which was signed by 24 million people in 166 countries and was presented to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 (Pettifor 2006, p. 305). A key symbol of the campaign was the human chain, formed around various G8 summits and also around the World Bank, the IMF and several other sites of the global economy in the years leading up to the millennium.

The campaign was unusual because of its religious framing and the leading role of the churches. The Vatican, various national councils of Catholic Bishops, the Bishops of the Anglican Communion, the World Council of Churches and Evangelical churches associated with Tearfund were all involved. They utilized their extensive institutional networks of parishes, relief agencies, universities and lobbying organisations to support the campaign and call for debt relief for poor countries (Donnelly n.d., p. 20). The frame was rooted in the Judeo-Christian Book of Leviticus' prescription that at certain points in time economic relations should be re-set by freeing slaves, returning or redistributing land and wealth, and canceling debts. The centrality of the religious frame drew faith-based organisations to the forefront of the campaign and motivated and inspired a fairly establishment group of people to join with more radical activists to call for debt relief for poor countries.

In the UK the first key supporters of the campaign were Evangelical groups connected to Tearfund. Whilst the idea of a global campaign on debt seemed quite radical to them, and was certainly more radical than any of the issues on which they had campaigned before, if they had campaigned at all, they were fired up and excited by the Christian framing (Pettifor 2006, p. 299). Stephen Rand, then Prayer and Campaigns Director for Tearfund and one of the people who a few years later would be foundational in the inception of the Micah Challenge, explained to me:

> [The Jubilee framing] was enormously significant for the Tearfund constituency because they bought into the biblical argument quite strongly. That was the rolling tide that bought the Evangelical constituency into that movement.

Tearfund was the first major British NGO to send out a circular to its supporters asking them to donate to the Jubilee 2000 campaign, and a few years later Tear Australia led the formation of Jubilee 2000 Australia. In other countries Protestant and Catholic groups were more central in organizing Jubilee 2000 coalitions and

Evangelicals played a far smaller role, if they were involved at all (Donnelly n.d., p. 15; Friesen 2012, pp. 58, 65; Pettifor 2006, p. 300).

In the UK churches hired buses to take their congregations to the demonstrations around the G8 in Birmingham, and church-goers that I interviewed spoke of the wonderful excitement of heading up to Birmingham together, singing hymns on the way. A senior Tearfund staff member told me:

> People from my own church turned up at the demonstration in Birmingham. And they'd never been to a demonstration before in their lives. We didn't call it a demonstration, of course, it was human chain.

Across the UK Jubilee 2000 activities became part of churches' celebration of the millennium, along with parish parties and fireworks (Reitan 2007, p. 77). For many Evangelicals campaigning for debt reduction became a deeply meaningful religious experience. Stephen Rand describes a prayer vigil that was held in his Baptist church during the 2000 G8 meeting in Okinawa, Japan:

> The G8 leaders were in Okinawa. A small group of us were in a West London church. As we followed the Summit Watch vigil guide I realized that this was not just a routine ceremony. It was another step of faith; on a path that for many had included Birmingham and Cologne, the petition clipboard on the village green and outside the polling booth, the postcards and letters sent to [Prime Ministers] Tony [Blair] and Gordon [Brown] and the Japanese Embassy. As the vigil ended we were invited to light a candle, and place it at the front of the church. At first no-one moved. Then, in deep silence, one and another solemnly took their candles forward. The silent movement spoke eloquently of commitment, of determination, of faith, of hope. The candle flames flickered, as the highest aspirations of the human spirit were fueled again by God's compassion and justice. The spirituality at the heart of Jubilee 2000 had never felt so powerful.
>
> (Stephen Rand, quoted in Barrett 2000, p. 19)

As well as bringing about a certain amount of debt cancellation, Jubilee 2000 had a profound effect on the Evangelical church in the UK. It educated a large number of Evangelicals about one of the most fundamental structural issues underlying global poverty and it made campaigning and advocacy something that was acceptable, and indeed important. A survey in 2011 found that 94% of the UK's Evangelicals now thought that Christians should engage with government (Alliance 2011; Green and Hewitt 2011, pp. 5–12). Stephen Rand explained the sea change to me like this:

> From Jubilee 2000, from say 1997 to 2005, and I think because of Jubilee 2000 largely, the Evangelical constituency broadly moved into acceptance of political campaigning. That's a whole load of individual journeys, but it's also about the tone and it's about what church leaders are saying. And I think

more and more church leaders, the ministers in the pulpit, would be posi-
tive about signing petitions and all of those things. . . . I'd like to think that
Tearfund itself, and the involvement in Jubilee 2000, significantly shifted
the Evangelical constituency towards an understanding of concern for the
poor . . . including campaigning for change.

Evangelicals in Australia went through a similar transition and also came to accept
campaigning and advocacy. In other countries, however, where Evangelicals had
been far less engaged with the Jubilee 2000 campaign, this transition did not take
place. One of the aims of the Micah Challenge, which was being discussed in the
UK already in the early 2000s, was to spread this new Evangelical engagement
with advocacy for the poor to the rest of the global Evangelical church. Stephen
Rand, who as pivotal in those early discussions, explained to me:

> The context was very different [in other countries], because once you've got
> that sea change in the UK where the predominant wave is that this campaign-
> ing stuff for third world poverty is acceptable, in a sense you don't have to
> make the argument any more. . . . I think the challenge for Micah Challenge
> was that in many countries that battle hadn't been fought.

Joel Edwards, another one of the initiators of the Micah Challenge and later its
Director, echoes the same sentiment:

> Globally was a very different picture from the UK. In a way we were trying to
> take the UK context and spread it globally. We were trying to use the muscle
> of the experience [of Jubilee 2000] . . . and that's why the UK, and to some
> extent Australia, were real engine rooms for what Micah Challenge was seek-
> ing to do globally. . . . Europe and other parts of the world were way behind
> in advocacy, way behind.

The Micah Challenge

As the Jubilee 2000 campaign was beginning to wind down, Joel Edwards, then
Director of the Evangelical Association UK, and Stephen Rand, then Campaigns
and Prayer Coordinator at Tearfund, started to talk about the idea of a global
Evangelical advocacy campaign for the poor. They wanted to build on the Jubilee
2000 experience and make advocating for justice a core part of the work of the
global Evangelical church. When they heard about the new Millennium Develop-
ment Goals (MDGs), ratified by most countries at the UN Millennium Summit in
September 2000, they thought this would be a good basis for their campaign. Joel
Edwards explained:

> When we heard of the MDGs we thought 'Incredible! These eight promises
> are historic. They reflect the promises of the prophets about justice'. And if

governments are holding themselves accountable to the poor, why should we not as the church get behind such promises and seek to mobilise Christians globally, particularly Evangelicals.

In May 2001, as a way of testing these ideas within the wider global Evangelical community, Stephen Rand crafted a resolution on global poverty and the MDGs and presented it at the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.[6] It started with the words:

> As a global Christian community seeking to live in obedience to Scripture, we recognise the challenge of poverty across God's world. We welcome the international initiative to halve world poverty by 2015, and pledge ourselves to do all we can, through our organisations and churches, to back this with prayerful, practical action in our nations and communities.

The resolution was the first of its kind at the WEA and Rand and his colleagues were delighted when it passed. It marked a new openness from the WEA to actively engage in worldly matters, including political advocacy for the poor. From 2001–2003, discussions continued between the UK's Evangelical Alliance, the World Evangelical Alliance, Tearfund and the Micah Network about the possibility of organizing a global Evangelical campaign against poverty. After long discussions, it was eventually decided that the campaign should be a collaboration between the Micah Network and the World Evangelical Alliance, that local Evangelical churches should be mobilized to advocate to their governments, and that the MDGs should form the central framework. According to Joel Edwards:

> Micah Challenge was perceived as the campaigning bit of the Micah Network family, so that Micah Network would do integral mission and be a term of reference for emerging NGOs. Micah Challenge would be a specific campaigning arm, which had never happened before. And it would be a global campaigning arm which would draw on the intellectual property and the expertise of the NGO world and blend that with church, which is why at the very beginning Micah Challenge became the child of Micah Network and the WEA.

From the very beginning the aim was to fit advocacy work into the overall approach of integral mission. One of the key elements of this was that it would be the local churches that would carry out the advocacy and campaigning, and that it would become part of their religious practice.[7] The Director of the Micah Network, who was also on the Board of the Micah Challenge, explained it to me like this:

> They said this was a tremendous achievement, for the world to agree on these eight goals, let's use that momentum and see how we can, through our integral mission lens, try to mobilise churches to take their responsibility.

Thus the aim was never to establish an expert-led advocacy department where professionals met with politicians and lobbied them about various issues. The aim was always to transform the church and to get it and its members to engage in popular advocacy and campaigning as part of the living out of their faith. Joel Edwards explained:

> A very important part of our work was raising the consciousness . . . and mobilising a section of civil society called the Evangelical church. . . . Changing the churches was the key part of it. Sensitising the churches. Sustainable long term engagement and paradigm shift was the idea . . . [We wanted to take] advocacy and build it in as integral to our Christian witness.

The Micah Challenge campaign was officially launched at the UN on 15 October 2004 and ran until 2015, when the deadline for the accomplishment of the MDGs was reached. It had two stated objectives: (1) to provide the global Evangelical community with a means of influencing national and international policies affecting key areas, and (2) to significantly increase the involvement/ action of Evangelicals in favour of the poor (Edwards 2008, p. 7). In 2004 it issued the Micah Call, a statement of the vision and values of the campaign, and which it asked individuals and church leaders to sign to show their support. The call set out the prophetic vision of the church, made mention of holistic transformation and referred to the key biblical passage from Micah 6:8. It also called on Christians to play their own part in working for the poor, as well as asking them to hold their national leaders to account for achieving the MDGs.

> This is a moment in history of unique potential
> when the stated intentions of world leaders
> echo something of the mind of the Biblical prophets
> and the teachings of Jesus concerning the poor, and
> when we have the means to dramatically reduce poverty.
>
> We commit ourselves, as followers of Jesus,
> to work together for the holistic transformation of our communities,
> to pursue justice, be passionate about kindness and to walk humbly with God.
>
> We call on international and national decision-makers
> of both rich and poor nations, to fulfil their public promise
> to achieve the Millennium Development Goals
> and so halve absolute global poverty by 2015.
>
> We call on Christians everywhere to be agents of hope
> for and with the poor, and to work with others
> to hold our national and global leaders accountable
> in securing a more just and merciful world

The basic structure of the campaign was an international secretariat of three to four people, based in London, and then national campaigns based in other countries in both the North and the South. Each national campaign had a coordinator, and occasionally a few other staff or interns. The global secretariat was overseen by a board, whose members came from both the Micah Network and the WEA. A similar structure was set up for each of the national campaigns, where a steering committee was set up with both NGO staff and people from the local Evangelical Alliance or the local Evangelical churches.

Initial conversations were held in 63 countries regarding getting involved in Micah Challenge and national campaigns of varying capacities were set up in 41 countries (Winter and Woodhead 2014, pp. 26–28). In some countries the coordinator was based in the office of a local Evangelical development NGO, often Tearfund, while in other countries they would be based in the office of the local Evangelical Association. The idea was that each national campaign would look at the situation regarding the MDGs in their country and would decide what specific issues to lobby their governments on to ensure that the MDGs were reached. It was hoped that the NGOs would bring expertise in development matters and policy issues and would develop specific policy asks which church leaders and members of the local churches could then campaign on. The international secretariat would support the national campaigns by providing resources, training and inspiration and would also organise a number of 'global moments'. These included Micah Sunday, which would take place on the Sunday closest to the International Day of Poverty in October, and three global campaigns in which all of the national campaigns would be invited to participate as the global church.

Mobilising the national campaigns, however, proved to be extremely difficult. There were a number of challenges. In many cases the national coordinators were young and inexperienced and there was often a lack of adequate funding. In other cases the local Evangelical Alliance was poorly organized and did not represent many of the Evangelical churches in the country. And in many countries in the global South it was difficult to do national level policy advocacy with undemocratic governments. Notwithstanding these practical challenges, the most serious challenge proved to be one of theology. While the Micah Network had already been working for a few years to promote Evangelical social engagement through the theology of integral mission, and was seeing some shifts in attitude, by far the majority of global Evangelicals still followed the premillennial dispensationalist theology and thus did not believe that they should engage with worldly matters, let alone politics, and instead should focus on saving souls. This challenge was found in virtually every country in which the Micah Challenge worked. To give but two examples, the Coordinator of Micah Challenge Switzerland explained it to me like this:

> It was difficult to create a movement inside of the Church. . . . They look at me and say 'but that's how it is. Jesus says that the world will go down and he will create a new earth, so why should we bother about the earth?' . . . This theology in the head of people is one of the biggest problems.

And the coordinator of Micah Challenge India relayed similar issues:

> Lots of people were not convinced and raised questions. They said we would be diverting our attention and energies towards helping the poor but we are going to leave this world and have permanent abode of heaven, so we don't need to be worried about this. The government has the responsibility, if the government doesn't do it, why should we be worried about it? It will be unnecessarily diverting out attention from preaching the gospel to other things. . . . I had a lot of arguments like this.

A member of the international board summed up the global situation like this:

> 90% of [the Director's] work was trying to win the argument with the churches. So he did a lot of raising awareness, but he had very few lobbyists. To move them to the actual lobby-campaign mindset was very hard. He first had to win a theological argument, in the church, that the church should be in politics. And that is a very hard one.

The rest of this chapter looks at the way that the Micah Challenge sought to win this theological argument to convince Evangelicals around the world that advocacy for the poor was biblical and Godly, and thus to mobilise them to get involved.

Mobilising Evangelicals for development advocacy

Whereas integral mission, or transformational development, provides a theology of development to guide the development work of Evangelical NGOs, Reynolds and Offutt have argued that Evangelical engagement with advocacy around poverty issues has been hampered by the lack of a coherent underlying theology (Reynolds and Offut 2014, p. 249). Evangelical scholars have made similar claims (e.g. Davis 2009; Thacker 2015).[8] It is thus significant that the Micah Challenge tried to take the first steps towards developing such a theology.

Justice is Biblical

The first step in developing an Evangelical theology of justice was to persuade Evangelicals that justice was biblical and central to God's plan for the world. So the Micah Challenge team produced a lot of materials discussing the sections of the bible that deal with justice and showing its centrality in the bible, including the books *Micah's Challenge* (Tresser 2009) *Just Mercy* (Edwards 2010) and *Live Just.ly* (Fileta 2014), the *Jesus Agenda* DVD and study guide (McLachlin and Edwards 2012), and a number of shorter booklets, articles and blogposts. These publications mainly dwelt on the teachings of the Old Testament prophets and on Jesus's ministry in the New Testament. The Micah Challenge team sought to show the centrality of justice in the bible and to highlight the fact that many churches

were avoiding large sections of the bible in their sermons and teachings. The Director of Micah Challenge wrote in *Just Mercy*:

> After idolatry, God says more in the Bible about injustice than any other subject. But, even so, many of us who have attended church for decades can still count on our fingers and toes the number of Sunday sermons we have heard on justice.
>
> (Edwards 2010, p. 10)

In many churches round the world pastors would preach about the personal attributes of righteousness and holiness, but would ignore the more systemic issue of justice. The Micah Challenge team sought to connect these three elements and thus bring justice back into the picture. As Stephen Rand explained to me:

> Right wing Americans tend to be quite strong on righteousness. . . . When I preached, it would be that justice and righteousness is about doing the right thing. The bit about justice tends to be the public sphere, and doing the right thing in your family or in your street tends to be regarded as righteousness and morality.

In *Just Mercy* (2010), the International Director defines justice as 'righteousness responding to wrong' and tries to make the theological argument that righteousness, holiness and justice must be considered together. Building on the integral mission approach, which seeks to open out people's focus from the personal to the social, he argues that righteousness, holiness and justice are all fundamentally social, rather than personal, attributes:

> The Bible makes no distinction between God's justice, which redeems us at the cross, his holiness, which we share, or his Righteousness, which we display. Justice is the river that flows from the heart of God, responding to our sin and sinfulness in all its private and public manifestation. A theology that puts a wedge between personal holiness and prophetic advocacy uses the Bible to build a dam in that river.
>
> (Edwards 2010, p. 11)

And again in the study guide accompanying the *Jesus Agenda* DVD:

> In much of our teaching holiness is typically moralized or privatized, but there is nothing more central to the Scriptures that describes everything from our relationship to God, our communal behavior and justice. Biblical holiness is far bigger than human sexuality, piety or personal morality. It empowers us to tackle two giants of oppression to humanity: materialism and corruption. This study encourages us to consider holiness, righteousness and justice in an integrated way.
>
> (McLachlin and Edwards 2012, p. 16)

In the integral mission approach biblical justice is seen as being restorative – it is about restoring the world to the way that God created it, restoring it to a state of 'shalom'. In a piece called *The Message of Micah*, a member of the steering committee of Micah Challenge Australia (who was also on the International Board) writes:

> Biblical justice is incredibly comprehensive in its requirements and consequences. Biblical justice is a restorative function – affirmative action on behalf of the powerless to restore their proper (meaning God-ordained) position in human society. It is concerned with fair wages and fair trading, with equality under the law so that there is not one law for the rich and well-connected, and another for the poor and marginalized. Biblical justice is about ensuring that the weak have access to all that which is needed to play a full and dignified role in human society, to experience life as God intended it to be. Biblical justice is a consequence of the fact that all men and woman are created in the image of God, and equally loved by him. Along with love justice is absolutely fundamental to biblical ethics.
>
> (Bradbury 2011)

The International Campaigns Manager explained to me how she would apply this biblical concept of restorative justice to the MDGs, about which they were campaigning:

> When we talk about poverty, the MDGs, which was the underpinning of the campaign, there was a sense that poverty wasn't just a personal choice or an accident, but it was the result of structures in the global economic and social system that kept people away from opportunity, from equity, and that these things made God angry, that God had always been angry about injustice. And that justice was about access to that sense of wellbeing and restoration and peace that is summed up by *tzedek*, I suppose, in the Old Testament. And justice was much more than 'this is right, or wrong', it was the sense of restoration, equity and opportunity and hope to those people, for various reasons, didn't have those things.

Furthermore, the Micah Challenge team felt that it was important to emphasise that justice was something quite different from charity. Whilst giving help or money to those in need was all well and good, they tried to communicate that there were systemic problems that were causing many people to live in poverty, despite their own choices and actions, and that therefore it was important to also lobby governments to change these bigger systemic problems in order to bring about justice and restoration, and ultimately, the Kingdom of God. The International Campaigns Manager explained it to me like this:

> [The framing] was very much justice. We were working with lots of supporters who would start from a charity perspective, 'I am blessed so I should

bless others', or 'there is so much unhappiness in the world, I should be contributing to make the world a better place'. These are very valid places to start, but we would say it was also a matter a justice, that God was a God of justice, . . . tell them how people stood up against injustice, how they acted. And we would use those examples – Esther, Nehemia, daughters of Zelophehad, you know, the whole thing to show that this was a Biblical concept. And that it wasn't just charity and sympathy, but that I guess God wanted us to bring in the Kingdom of God more on Earth, and the Kingdom of God was the Kingdom of Justice.

Advocacy is not politics

The team had to walk a fine line between talking about biblical justice and the Kingdom of God and then translating this into the practical action which they were seeking, namely advocacy to governments about the MDGs. If it sounded too political then people would pull away. The Coordinator of Micah Challenge Australia explained to me:

> When you try to invite people to look at the systems that bind people and constrain choices and options . . . it's not something we are in the habit of doing and it can be threatening because it feels like an alien political agenda being imposed on a church group or an organisation.

Similarly, if things began to sound too political many Evangelicals would get worried that they were losing their focus on what was actually the most important thing – saving souls. This issue would come up again and again, in pretty much every country where the Micah Challenge worked. The Coordinator of Micah Challenge USA gave me this example:

> There was a guy who spoke at one of our events, and he was like 'the Millennium Development Goals are great, but they won't get you into heaven. So let's not lose sight of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ'. He wasn't actually responding to anything we said, he was more responding to what he knew people were afraid of, which was that we would lose sight of the Gospel.

And thus the team had to put a lot of effort into convincing people that engaging with justice and advocacy was not 'politics', but that it was religious action. They sought to convince people that advocating on behalf of the poor was part of their living out their faith. Thus the Coordinator of Micah Challenge USA continued:

> Part of that was that he didn't understand that for us this *was* part of the Gospel. So we weren't losing sight of the Gospel, we were preaching a more inclusive and encompassing Gospel that actually had ramifications for this life, not just the next.

This theme is a clear extension of the integral mission theology to include justice and advocacy and it permeated most of the Micah Challenge publications and communications. It can be seen very clearly in the *Just Mercy* book, where the International Director writes:

> Justice isn't politics. It's far more than that. Justice is righteousness responding to wrong. And this means that doing justice is central to the Christian faith. . . . God's justice is more than a message. It's God's mission to a broken world.
>
> (Edwards 2010, pp. 11–12)

However, in order to convince Evangelicals to take the step from caring about justice to actually engaging in advocacy it was also necessary to develop a theology of advocacy. Again, the starting point was the bible, and much of Micah Challenge's early writings on advocacy focus on biblical examples of advocacy. Many of the publications focus on the Old Testament prophets, particularly on Micah, Isaiah, Hosea who pointed out the injustice and corruption in the Israelite kingdoms, or on Esther, who is hailed as a biblical character who did advocacy with King Ahashverosh, or on Moses who is said to have done advocacy with Pharoah. In all these texts, advocacy is presented as something that is solidly biblical and profoundly Godly.

> Esther's story, told in the biblical book that takes her name, is a vivid reminder that advocacy is one of the most powerful tools God has given us to combat oppression and injustice.
>
> (Micah Challenge Australia 2011)

It was emphasized again and again that advocacy was not political, but rather a way of living out faith. It was seen as a profoundly religious action, partnering with God in his work of redemption.

> Christian witness is growing increasingly to encompass not only practical action but also prophetic advocacy for the poor. Advocacy – speaking up for the poor – takes us a step beyond practical action to prophetic engagement. Quite frankly, it's not something we are always comfortable in doing. It looks on the face of it to be nothing more than political activism. However, there is a world of difference between political activism for ideological reasons and speaking to the powerful with and on behalf of the poor in the name of Christ. When Moses stood before Pharaoh and said 'Let my people go!' this was advocacy. . . . It does not come from political conviction but is the overflow behavior of people who walk in biblical humility and who love mercy. . . . Our advocacy is neither the easy nor the political option, but it is what righteousness demands.
>
> (Edwards 2010, pp. 50–51)

Advocacy as religious action

Across the Micah Challenge it was felt that in order to convince Evangelicals to do advocacy it was necessary to turn advocacy into a personal religious action. A new type of 'lifestyle advocacy' was developed across the Micah world. It was formulated most explicitly in the USA, under the name of 'transformational advocacy', but the general ideas and approach were used across the movement. The International Director also developed a charismatic theology of advocacy inspired by the Holy Spirit to reach out to Pentecostals and Charismatics. Both approaches sought to shift advocacy from being purely a dry matter of dealing with impersonal structural factors into a more personal activity that linked also with lifestyle, holiness and religious experience.

Activists in some parts of the movement worried that traditional advocacy felt very secular and disconnected from their other religious activity. The coordinator of Micah Challenge USA explained it to me like this:

> We felt like traditional advocacy wasn't working as far as it didn't really connect with the church. . . . We realised that there wasn't any personal aspect to it. So I'd go to these churches and these college campuses and try to inspire people and get them to change their whole way of thinking about their lives. And then to say, 'just keep living the same way you always lived but write a letter to Congress' and so on, that just felt really empty to me.

And so, in collaboration with some other Evangelical development NGOs, they developed the concept of 'transformational advocacy'. As transformational development was to regular development, so transformational advocacy would be to regular advocacy. Transformational advocacy would be holistic religious action. It was something done by Christians, as Christians, and in a deeply Christian way. One of the main ways that transformational advocacy differs from traditional advocacy is that it has a personal morality and holiness lifestyle element to it and it includes a focus on the person doing the advocacy. Thus transformational advocacy widens out the concept of advocacy to include not just policy change, but also the behaviour change of individuals. The goal of transformational advocacy is 'changing attitudes, policy and behaviours that perpetuate injustice'. With this formulation it becomes important that the person advocating must also be working on their own personal righteousness and living justly themselves. In an interview on an Evangelical website the coordinator of Micah Challenge USA put it like this:

> Transformational advocacy is the process of challenging ourselves and our leaders to change attitudes, behaviors, and policies that perpetuate injustice and deny God's will for all creation to flourish. . . . Transformational advocacy recognizes that there are systemic injustices that must be challenged in order to see God's intention for all creation to flourish, but also recognizes

that we can't ask our leaders to do something we ourselves aren't willing to do. We can't ask for integrity, generosity, justice, and compassion from our leaders if we too don't embrace them in our hearts and actions. This differs from traditional advocacy which focuses on changing policy without recognizing the logs in our own eyes so to speak. Traditional advocacy also tends to create an 'us vs. them' mentality when engaging people of power – transformational advocacy recognizes that we are all guilty before God for the sins of injustice, and we are all invited to be a part of God's solution to bring healing in the world (Fast. Forward. The End of Poverty).

Furthermore, transformational advocacy could also provide a new route through which Evangelicals could proclaim the glory of God to new groups of people. Transformational advocacy is holistic and it therefore has a spiritual component to it. As religious action transformational advocacy could be both a form of worship and a form of proclamation. The coordinator of Micah Challenge USA explained it like this in an educational video on the Micah Challenge USA website:

> This is the beautiful work of advocacy. And we do it as worship, we do it to glorify God. God takes joy when His people stand up and speak out against unjust policies . . . and hold their leaders to account to a higher standard. . . . When we do that we don't take off our Christian faith, we don't take off our identity as followers of Jesus. We bring that with us, into these places which are often secular, into these places where conversations about faith are uncomfortable. We bring who we are into these places, we bring Jesus into the room. . . . Advocacy is a way that we tell the world about who our God is. We proclaim that God is a God of justice, that his concern for the vulnerable, for the oppressed, for the marginalized is so great that we, his followers, can't help but speak out. When the world hears of our God who is deeply concerned about the lives of people who are marginalized, who is deeply concerned about how policies impact the poor, they'll take notice. . . . Advocacy is a chance for us to tell the world about who our God is.

The International Director further built on these ideas and sought to reach out to Pentecostal and Charismatic Evangelicals, who very much focus on the role of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and who constitute a substantial proportion of the global Evangelical church, particularly in the global South (Anderson 2004; Freeman 2012; Martin 2002). As a British black Pentecostal, with roots in the Caribbean, he himself was motivated by the experience of the Holy Spirit in his life. And thus he sought to develop a theology of advocacy that made a direct connection between the intense spirituality that Pentecostals and Charismatics experience in their ecstatic worship and the act of political advocacy. He based this theology on the story of Moses who, according to the bible, was persuaded to advocate to Pharaoh on behalf of the Israelites during an intense episode at the burning

bush where God appeared to him and directly commissioned him for the task. He explained to me:

> Advocacy is what the Holy Spirit does on our behalf. This appeal to God on our behalf. So the notion of advocacy is already there. We used Moses quite a lot, we like Moses as a paradigm for advocacy – God meets him at the burning bush, at the place of worship, and it's at the place of worship that he is commissioned to go to Pharaoh. That's high grade, it doesn't get any higher than that in advocacy. And so what we tried to do, especially when talking to the church, was to build a theological line of continuity from worship at the burning bush to commissioning to go to Pharaoh's house. Our argument was based on . . . [the idea that] you cannot start off at the burning bush and not find your way to Pharaoh's house.

This theology was developed in the *Jesus Agenda* DVD, which 'asks how the liberating power of the Spirit should lead 21st century Christians to become advocates of the poor' (McLachlin and Edwards 2012, p. 3), and again in the *Use by 2015* booklet that was brought out in the same year. The key theme was that spiritual experiences of the divine should lead people to activism on behalf of the poor. The call to advocacy is framed as a deeply personal and intense religious experience. And if you have such an experience, then you must play your part in response and let the Holy Spirit drive you to engage in advocacy for the poor. Framed this way, advocacy for the poor is not simply political activism, it is something that is driven by spiritual forces and the experience of God. It is deeply religious action. *Use by 2015* puts it like this:

> Moses' journey which began at the burning bush ended up in Pharaoh's palace where he found himself advocating for the freedom of the Hebrew slaves. . . . What fuelled Moses' passion was neither egotism nor a political philosophy: it was the mandate of the burning bush. That's where it began. For God who called him to draw near without his sandals and sent him striding into the palace. Afraid and on a steep learning curve Moses became God's first biblical advocate for justice. . . . Those of us who hunger for a Moses experience at the burning bush should walk with him to Pharaoh's house.
>
> (Micah Challenge International 2012, p. 10)

From theology to mobilisation

Taken together, the theological writings of the Micah Challenge go some way to developing an Evangelical theology of justice and advocacy. But it would be fair to say that this task is still to be completed. In their effort to make advocacy palatable to Evangelicals, Micah Challenge found it necessary to emphasise personal morality and spiritual experience and in doing so they tended to lose sight of the larger structural issues that they were trying to address. In all the writings of Micah Challenge there are very few references to global political and economic

issues such as trade or debt or structural adjustment programmes, and there was no analysis of how systemic global factors lead to poverty for many people in the world. While much effort was spent trying to convince Evangelicals that it was appropriate and biblically sanctioned for them to engage in justice advocacy for the poor, much less energy was invested in analysing the causes of contemporary global poverty and thus in suggesting precisely for which policies and practices they should actually be advocating.

This may be part of the reason why the Micah Challenge did not really succeed in carrying out very much advocacy. While the Micah Challenge campaigns in the Northern countries did a small amount of lobbying and campaigning, mainly focused on asking for an increase in their country's aid budget, the campaigns in the South chose mainly to focus on educating Evangelicals about poverty and advocacy and in some cases carrying out direct practical action on behalf of the poor. The global campaigns motivated millions of Evangelicals to pray for the poor, but only a few thousand went further to talk to parliamentarians, to write letters to their MP or to march in the streets.

Australia was the exception.[9] There Evangelicals had already been persuaded about the acceptability of advocacy through their experience in the Jubilee 2000 campaign. With the theological battle already won, Micah Challenge Australia succeeded in bringing Evangelicals to Canberra each year to talk with their parliamentarians about global poverty. They campaigned on a variety of issues connected to the MDGs, including maternal health, child health, water, sanitation and hygiene, climate change and environmental sustainability. They also did a number of creative public engagements. For example they organised a Giant Toilet tour, where they toured around the country with a huge 2m high toilet and then parked it outside Parliament House, in a campaign about water and sanitation. And they organised 'Survive Past Five' birthday parties, which were held in churches to celebrate increases in rates of childhood survival, and after which congregants were encouraged to write to a member of parliament about the issue.

But in most countries there was very little policy analysis and very little political mobilisation. Evangelicals began to think about justice and poverty, and many started to pray for the poor. But very few actually took the step to engage in political advocacy. This is still an ongoing process, and things may change in the coming years. At the end of 2015 the Micah Network and the Micah Challenge merged to form Micah Global. National Micahs continue to operate in many countries, bringing together Evangelical development NGOs and local churches. As well as working to spread the idea of integral mission they plan to continue working on mobilising the local churches to engage in justice advocacy for the poor. So whilst the Micah Challenge has now come to an end, the process of shifting the Evangelical churches into an engaged justice mindset is still very much ongoing.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at recent developments in Evangelical thought and action regarding social engagement, and particularly regarding engagement

in political advocacy around issues of justice and poverty. It has shown how the Micah Challenge, the first transnational Evangelical advocacy campaign for the poor, has been working to try to bring about a major change in Evangelicalism, to open it out into a form of religion which holistically unites the personal and the social, the spiritual and the material, the moral and the political. Whilst this process is far from complete and is often met with resistance in many quarters of the global Evangelical world, it is slowly and gradually having an impact and bringing about a shift in Evangelical theology and religious practice.

In particular this chapter has shown how certain sections of the Evangelical world, particularly those engaged in international development work, are deepening their interest and involvement in global social issues and are working to develop an Evangelical theology of justice and advocacy. Whilst many of the concepts in this theology bear resemblance to those developed in the mainline ecumenical world many decades earlier, they are being translated into a 'lifestyle' practice that is quite distinctive. This study has shown how the Micah Challenge was instrumental in developing much of this new theology, and in spreading it to Evangelicals in many countries in both the global North and South. As such, it is possible to see the Micah Challenge as a development entrepreneur.

There have been many tensions in this attempt to engage global Evangelicals in social action and political advocacy on behalf of the poor, and in this chapter I have shown how the Micah Challenge sought to mediate between different discursive fields in order to create a nexus between its evangelical constituency and the field of international development (Koehrsen and Heuser 2019 this volume). It did this by seeking to overcome the divide between the personal and the social, the inner-worldly and the outer-worldly, and the religious and the secular. I have argued that it was not completely successful in overcoming these divides and that ultimately it faced a paradox which it could not overcome – that to make justice and advocacy palatable to Evangelicals it had to emphasise personal morality and spirituality, and yet in doing so it lost focus on the global political and economic issues that it wished to raise.

Nonetheless the Micah Challenge, and all the churches and NGOs that supported it, represent a major sea change in Evangelical thought and action around social justice, and it seems likely that this change will continue developing in the Evangelical world in the coming years.

Notes

1 Research for this chapter was carried about between September 2015 and November 2016 and consisted of interviews with present and former members of staff of the Micah Challenge and Tearfund and brief periods of ethnography at Micah meetings in London. UK interviews were carried out face-to-face, while interviews with staff in other countries were carried out over Skype. This was supplemented by an analysis of internal and publically available documents, writings on Evangelical websites, and a review of the relevant academic literature.

2 The word 'transformation' was also chosen in contrast to the word 'liberation', which Catholic and ecumenical Protestants had chosen instead of 'development' (Tizon 2011, p. 69).
3 Many of these theological ideas are similar to those in mainline Protestant ecumenical circles.
4 All interviewees are referred to by their job title at the time of the interview. To respect privacy, personal names are not mentioned, with the exception of public figures who are widely known to have held a particular role.
5 Tearfund is the notable exception here and it has been trying to educate and mobilise Evangelicals in the UK to engage in popular advocacy and campaigning since the late 1990s. For a detailed study see Freeman 2019.
6 Up to this point it was called the World Evangelical Fellowship, but from this meeting onwards it changed its name to the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).
7 This is very different to the approach of the World Council of Churches, which has a strong advocacy department, but where advocacy is carried out by expert professionals and not by local churches.
8 But see Gordon (2002) for Tearfund's approach to advocacy.
9 Micah Challenge UK had different problems. There Evangelicals were already doing advocacy through Tearfund and many also supported the ecumenical Christian development NGO, Christian Aid, and even the large secular NGOs such as Oxfam and Action-Aid. The field was therefore already rather full and there was some competition between the various organisations. Thus Micah Challenge UK was only active from 2006–2010 and never managed to become significant in the UK Evangelical scene.

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